

**Midwest Regional Rail Initiative
Status Report
December 2005**

Background

The Midwest Regional Rail Initiative (MWRRI) is a nine-state effort to develop an implementation plan for a 3,000-mile, high-speed rail system hubbed in Chicago. Studies done since 1996 have concluded that such a regional system, including a line from Chicago to Omaha through Davenport, Iowa City and Des Moines, is viable. The proposal is to upgrade most of the system to allow 110 mile-per-hour service with some low volume lines, including the Iowa portions, upgraded to allow 79 mile-per-hour service.

The nine-state coalition released a 2004 updated Executive Report for the system. As reported, the updated cost estimate for the Chicago to Omaha corridor, which includes a branch to Quincy, Illinois, is \$638 million for infrastructure and \$167 million for rolling stock. These costs are higher than first estimated in 1998 and are given in 2002 constant dollars. Operating subsidies would be required during an extended start-up phase. The allocation of these subsidy costs among the various states has not been determined and is still a subject for analysis and negotiation. Little progress on implementation is expected unless there is passage of a federal funding package for passenger rail initiatives. Continued Congressional discussions on policy directions relative to Amtrak cloud the issue of passenger rail funding. However, Congress is expected to address passenger rail issues and funding in 2006.

The participation of the Iowa Department of Transportation in the MWRRI is authorized under Iowa Code Section 327J.3.

Current Status

The ongoing work of the nine-state MWRRI steering committee is currently focusing on:

- 1) Further efforts of system planning in preparation for a programmatic environmental analysis and getting projects ready to proceed.
- 2) Developing support and advocating for a federal program to provide funding for passenger rail initiatives.
- 3) Continuing to develop ideas to address ongoing institutional and long-term management issues.

The MWRRI states participate in a variety of regional and national outreach activities to encourage Congressional support for a dedicated federal passenger rail funding program. The states have cooperated with a number of passenger rail support groups, including the Midwest High Speed Rail Coalition, Iowa Association of Railroad Passengers, the States for Passenger Rail Coalition and American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. All recognize that a strong state and federal funding partnership is essential to the development of a national passenger rail system.

Other MWRRI states are proceeding with studies and developing funding mechanisms in order to be ready for federal funds if they become available. These steps will also be required for the development of the Iowa portions of the system. To date, no Iowa funds have been appropriated for system engineering, design, environmental assessment, construction or operation. The

Passenger Rail Service Revolving Fund, created in Iowa Code Section 327J.2, has had no receipts or expenditures.

A copy of the recently released 2004 Executive Report on the MWRRI is available at www.iowarail.com.

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